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Andrew Wilson
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Dear Mr Wilson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Southbroom St James Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 27 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in December 2016. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Dyer

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2016.

- Improve teaching and learning across the school by ensuring that:
 - tasks and activities in reading, writing and mathematics are matched well to pupils' prior attainment, in particular for the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - teachers have a clear understanding of what the pupils need to learn next to be able to succeed in the full range of subjects
 - teachers check pupils' learning in lessons and take effective action to accelerate their rates of progress
 - assessment information is accurate and used to shape learning for groups and individuals
 - teachers' subject knowledge enables pupils to make strong progress, in particular in mathematics by developing pupils' basic calculation and computation skills, and enabling pupils to apply these through opportunities for problem-solving and reasoning
 - phonics skills are well taught and built upon so pupils can read, write and spell accurately
 - planned activities enable pupils to write more extensively and with greater depth across the curriculum.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - those responsible for checking the work of the school, including those on the board of trustees and local governing board, hold school leaders to account stringently, especially in their evaluations of teaching and learning, in order to improve outcomes for pupils
 - the quality of teaching improves rapidly, in particular to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, the most able and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - ongoing self-evaluation is accurate and leads to a very clear identification of priorities for improvement.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27 March 2018

Evidence

The inspector met with the executive headteacher, the head of school and the assistant headteacher, who is also the special education needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENCo). Together, they observed pupils in classrooms, spoke to them about their learning and analysed work in books. The inspector had discussions with middle leaders and two governors, including the chair of governors. He also met the chief executive officer and academy improvement director from the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT).

The inspector looked at the school's evaluation of its own performance, its academy improvement plan, a number of school documents and the minutes of improvement meetings held with the academy trust. He took account of 26 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke to a number of parents during the inspection. This inspection was the second monitoring visit since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2016. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the progress made by the school since the previous monitoring inspection in September 2017.

Context

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, leaders had made a number of new appointments to the school's staff. This included two new middle leaders for English and mathematics. At the beginning of the following term, a new assistant headteacher joined the leadership team. She also took on the role of SENCo. Following a time of significant turbulence in leadership and staff, the school is now benefiting from a period of prolonged stability.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Leaders have maintained the rapid pace of progress seen at the previous monitoring inspection. They are, therefore, judged to be taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The executive headteacher and head of school are ambitious and relentless in their desire to improve pupils' attainment. They hold high expectations for staff and pupils and this continues to be instrumental in further raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, a large number of pupils are making rapid progress towards their academic and personal targets.

The appointment of a skilled assistant headteacher has further strengthened the school's leadership capacity. Specifically, she leads on supporting pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Through this role, she is further developing the expertise of teaching assistants so they can precisely meet pupils'

needs and implement a wide range of intervention programmes. Additionally, the assistant headteacher has re-engaged with a number of external agencies. This has increased the school's capacity to identify pupils' needs and put in place the relevant support, for example with speech and language and pupils' emotional and mental health. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are now making progress which is in line with other pupils in the school.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the executive headteacher and head of school have developed the skills of the middle leaders responsible for mathematics and English. These leaders are now, in turn, raising staff's expertise in their subjects, as well as leading curriculum development. Together with senior leaders, they are implementing a strategic and proactive programme of monitoring to check the impact of their actions.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about leaders' actions, and recognise that the school continues to improve. The vast majority of parents would recommend the school to other parents. This is a significant improvement from the previous section 5 inspection. Parents spoken with during this inspection were particularly pleased with the greater levels of engagement between parents and the school. For example, they appreciate the opportunity to work alongside their children in classes. They value the curriculum information evenings, which have included sessions on reading, mathematics, science and homework. Parents of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities appreciate the 'parents' forum' where they can informally discuss their children's learning with school leaders.

Governors continue to hold school leaders to account and regularly check the impact of leaders' actions. They have a secure understanding of the progress being made towards priorities in the academy improvement plan, and have developed their skills in checking the accuracy of the information leaders provide them with. DSAT is providing the school with additional support and challenge. This level of scrutiny is proving to be a key factor in the school's continued development.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- In reading, writing and mathematics, pupils in all year groups are making strong progress. This is leading to greater proportions of pupils working at, or above, the expectations for their age. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are making similarly strong progress from their starting points in September. In some cases, these pupils are making greater progress than their peers.
- Attainment for pupils currently in Year 6 is still lower than that found nationally. However, in many cases, this is a result of historical inadequacies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders' actions to develop provision and raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are enabling these pupils to fill gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding. As a result, they are catching up rapidly.

- Since the previous monitoring visit, leaders have embedded a sophisticated system to track pupils' progress. This is understood by staff and governors and enables them to check the progress of individual pupils as well as key groups. Leaders and teachers meet regularly to monitor pupils' current attainment against where it is expected to be. They quickly identify where pupils are at risk of falling behind and swiftly put in place well-planned help.
- The SENCo tracks the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in order to check the impact that planned additional help is having on their attainment and progress. Where the impact is less than expected, she makes suitable adaptations and modifications.
- Following the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have put in place an effective programme for developing the teaching of phonics. This has raised staff's confidence and skills and, consequently, the quality of phonics teaching. Teachers exhibit strong phonics knowledge. For example, they model sounds accurately and correct pupils who pronounce their sounds inaccurately. This improved phonics teaching means that the majority of pupils who entered the school without the phonics skills expected for their age are now making good progress in this area.
- The middle leaders responsible for English and mathematics are strong classroom practitioners in their subjects. They act as good role models and demonstrate the school's desired approaches to teaching reading, writing and mathematics. Senior leaders recognise the capacity that these leaders have for increasing the skills of staff. Consequently they are giving them a greater role in making improvements across the school as a whole.
- In mathematics, pupils, guided by teachers, choose their level of challenge. This is based on pupils' skills as well as how confident they are about the concept being taught. Where appropriate, all levels of challenge contain reasoning activities so that all pupils receive regular opportunities to reason and apply their mathematical skills. This is leading to increased rates of progress and attainment for pupils of all abilities.
- Leaders have developed an approach to the teaching of reading which raises pupils' skills and promotes in them a love of reading. Pupils read often and with levels of fluency and comprehension appropriate to their age. Where pupils' skills are below those required, teaching assistants skilfully prepare them for the lesson so they can make sense of the class text and achieve success. Teachers use questioning effectively to probe pupils' comprehension. Where this is strongest, teachers ask follow-up questions to further deepen pupils' understanding. This provides pupils with opportunities to think deeply about their reading and develop their higher-order reading and comprehension skills.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers are not yet routinely implementing newly developed policies and approaches in all classes. There are inconsistencies in practice between year

groups and, in some cases, between classes in the same year group. This is most noticeable in the application of the school's policy for responding to pupils' work.

- The school's curriculum is not enabling pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across a wide range of subjects. As a result, the progress pupils make is slower than in English and mathematics. Additionally, despite improvement since the previous monitoring inspection, scope for pupils to apply their writing skills across the curriculum, for example through historical recounts, remains limited.
- The teaching of spelling remains a weakness and there are inconsistencies in how teachers apply the school's policy. For example, pupils' writing and topic books demonstrate a wide variance in how teachers are correcting pupils' spelling errors. Additionally, books in which pupils practise their spellings indicate that teachers' expectations are not consistently as high as in other subjects.
- In mathematics, teachers are providing pupils with greater opportunities to reason. However, pupils' books highlight some weaknesses in teachers' knowledge of how different reasoning activities can be used to deepen pupils' understanding. Leaders have recognised this and have put in place a programme of professional development for all staff.

External support

Leaders recognise the value of engaging with external providers and have been proactive in procuring additional support. This has proved effective in the continuing development of teaching and learning. For example, leaders are working productively alongside an external English consultant to develop the teaching of reading.

Further support has been obtained through the trust. This has included staff training as well as moderation to validate the accuracy of teachers' assessments.